

*Magruder's American Government*  
*2005 Edition*

**Chapter 1, Section 2, Part B**

**Forms of Government**

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## 1. What is *Unitary Government*?

Basically it's a governmental structure in which all governing authority resides in one central locus of government. To the degree that the **central government** delegates authority to a smaller unit of government, it does so **conditionally**.

In other words, in a unitary system of government, the central government has the prerogative to delegate power, and to take it back, whenever it wishes.

Most states in the modern world have unitary governments.

## 2. What is an example of a modern state with a unitary government?

The United Kingdom of Great Britain has all governmental power vested in its **Parliament** (an assembly of elected representatives, at least in the **House of Commons**).

Parliament has the prerogative to delegate powers to provincial and local government, as well as the ability to take them back.

### 3. Is Unitary Government the same thing as dictatorship?

No.

A nation can be a representative democracy with a unitary government. Great Britain has both democracy and unitary government.

### 4. What is federal government?

It is a system of government in which governmental authority is divided between levels. The **central (i.e. national) government** possesses some powers while more local (i.e. provincial) levels possess others.

The **provincial levels of government** are “built in” to the overall system of government (perhaps in accordance to a constitution), and cannot be abolished by the whims of the central government.

**5. Basically, federal government is a form of divided government in what direction?**

Vertically (i.e. upper and lower)

**6. Is the government of the United States of America a federal system?**

Yes it is.

In American governmental system, governmental authority is divided vertically between the national government (sometimes called the “federal” government) and the state governments (e.g. the governments of Alabama, New York, Minnesota, etc.).

In the American federal system, states like Alabama and California have a guaranteed existence. The federal government cannot abolish a state (like Alabama) unilaterally (i.e. by itself).

The American federal system is established by the *U.S. Constitution*, a document that places states at the heart of electing officials to the national government (e.g. congressional and presidential elections).

## 7. In the American system of government, are our individual 50 states federal or unitary?

Our individual states have unitary governments. For example, the State of Alabama could choose to have a state constitution that abolishes counties and city government. Only the existence of Alabama as a state is guaranteed.

Oh yeah, each state (e.g. Alabama, Kentucky, Delaware) are required by the U.S. Constitution to have a “republican” form of government, but it does not spell out what that is.

## 8. What is a *confederate* form of government?

A **confederate** government is a union of sovereign states in which the member states delegate certain powers to a central government.

In a **confederated** form of government, the central government exists as a creation of the individually sovereign states. In a confederation, the powers of the central government are usually rather limited and narrowly specified.

True **confederations** are rare in the modern world. The **European Union** is something of a confederation.

9. What is the difference between a *state* like Alabama and the *state* of Germany?

Unfortunately, we use the same word for two different things. Keep in mind: Germany is an independent and sovereign country. The State of Alabama is not, especially since the American Civil War.

Look at the context in which *state* is used to determine how it is being used.

10. In American history, what are two vivid examples of confederations?

*The Articles of Confederation* (c. 1781-c.1788), the initial government charter of union of the American states. In 1787, a Constitutional Convention drafted a new constitution, a document that ultimately replaced the Articles of Confederation.

11. **The Confederate States of America** (1861-1865), a union of 11 Southern states that seceded from the United States. The Confederate States of America fought a four year war against the United States, a conflict commonly known as the **American Civil War**. The United States defeated the Confederate States, thus restoring the American Union under the U.S. Constitution.

**12. If federalism is a vertical separation of governmental power, then what is an example of horizontal separation of powers?**

The separation of powers by government function (e.g. legislative, executive, and judicial)

**13. In presidential government, the executive and legislative functions of government are what?**

Separate, independent, and coequal

The United States has presidential government under the **U.S. Constitution**.

**14. What is parliamentary government?**

Under parliamentary government, the executive and legislative functions of government are not independent of one another. Often, the Prime Minister and Cabinet (executive officers) are chosen by the dominant party (or coalition of parties) in the parliament (a representative law-making body).

Many nations today have a parliamentary system of government.